

Shared Neutrals Program Guide

Chapter 2 – Agency Participation

updated 11/12/2004

Participating agencies share resources to benefit from low cost, high quality, timely alternative dispute resolution

Agency Agreements

A formal letter of commitment qualifies an agency to participate in the Shared Neutrals Program. This letter *must* include five key elements.

1. **Cases:** Specify 1) the types of cases the agency *will* submit for requests for services, and 2) any types of cases which the agency will *exclude* from the Program.
2. **Agency Liaison:** Identify an Agency Liaison to the Program, including a brief description of his/her background, particularly as it relates to ADR.
3. **Access to the Process:** Identify which agency personnel are authorized to make requests. Indicate whether all requests must go through the Agency Liaison or whether agency employees may request services directly.
4. **Documentation:** Identify any particular forms that should be used to document ADR processes and who receives copies.
5. **Non-retaliation Statement:** State that the agency will not retaliate against anyone who chooses to participate in, or not participate in, mediation. There will be no retaliation for a party withdrawing from mediation.

This letter *should* also include three other elements:

6. **Contributions:** How the agency plans to contribute to the Program through neutrals, access to conference rooms, funding, etc.
7. **Outreach:** An outline of how the Shared Neutrals Program will be made known and available to interested agency personnel.
8. **Reimbursement of Mediator Expenses:** How the agency will reimburse neutrals. Include what expenses will and will not be covered (travel, long-distance calls, parking, per diem/meals, etc.).

It is the responsibility of the Agency Liaison to provide written notification of any changes to the agreements above. Agency Liaisons may contact the Program Coordinator for help on how to provide this information.

For more information on the role and responsibilities of the Agency Liaison, please see the next chapter. (Also, please see Sample **Letter of Commitment** (*ch. 6*).

Benefits

Sharing resources through participation in the Shared Neutrals Program offers agencies numerous benefits. Participating in this intergovernmental exchange provides low cost access to cutting edge ADR methods.

Lower costs and reduced risks

- No charges minimizes administrative costs
- Minimizes lost productivity
- Reduces the risks and costs of litigation
- Protects privacy
- Preserves other options for dispute resolution
- Maximizes potential for agreement and compliance

Access to credible ADR

- Enhances perception of neutrality and confidentiality in sensitive disputes
- Provides ADR to agencies without trained neutrals on staff
- Offers greater access to pool of competent, diverse neutrals
- Accesses specialized ADR technical expertise
- Allows mentoring opportunities to benefit experienced and less-experienced neutrals
- Assists in developing ADR programs and processes

Collaborative, creative problem solving

- Enhances work life
- Speeds dispute resolution
- Boosts morale
- Preserves and enhances relationships

Contributions

The strength of the Shared Neutrals Program lies in its member agencies and the contributions they make. In addition to neutrals, agencies contribute such things as meeting space, administrative support, printing, and funds for training and program coordination.

The Shared Neutrals Program reserves the option to require contributions commensurate with benefits.

Outreach

Accessibility is key to the success of the Shared Neutrals Program. Here are some ideas for making the program as accessible as possible to your agency's employees.

Ideas for Outreach:

- ✓ Publish information on the Program in a newsletter or online.
- ✓ Print and post Program flyers on bulletin boards.

- ✓ Print brochures and make them available throughout the agency.
- ✓ Invite Program members to give presentations at staff meetings.
- ✓ Send personnel to OFEB-sponsored training on the Program.

Participating Agencies as of November 2004

Federal

Albany Research Center, Dept. of Energy
Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District
Bonneville Power Administration
Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Office
Chemawa Indian School, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs – Medical Center (Portland)
Department of Veterans Affairs, Regional Office (Portland)
Environmental Protection Agency
Indian Health Service, Portland Area
Internal Revenue Service, Pacific Northwest District
Small Business Administration
US Attorney, District of Oregon
USDA – National Agriculture Statistics Services OR SSO
USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
US Forest Service, Region 6 (Oregon & Washington) & Pacific Northwest Research Station

State

Dept. of Corrections, Human Resources, SW Region South (Vancouver, WA)
Dept. of Social Health Services/, Division of Child Support (Vancouver, WA)
Oregon Military Department

Local

Centennial School District, Portland
City of Beaverton (Oregon)
City of Gresham (Oregon)
City of Milwaukie
City of Portland (Oregon)
City of Vancouver (Washington)
City of Wilsonville (Oregon)
Clark County (Washington)
Evergreen School District